

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
HEALTH PROFESSIONS QUALITY ASSURANCE DIVISION
WASHINGTON STATE NURSING COMMISSION
POLICY/PROCEDURE**

Title:	Patient Abandonment Defined	Number:	A13.02
Reference:			
Contact:	Discipline Manager		
Effective Date:	October 22, 2003 Amended to correct WAC citation. October 25, 1996 Amended 9/28/01 to reflect correct WAC citation. The LPN and RN Boards were merged in 1994 and the rules were combined in 1997 which resulted in new WAC numbers.		
Supersedes:			
Approved:			
	Victoria Fletcher, Chair Washington State Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission		

PURPOSE STATEMENT:

To clarify WAC 246-840-710(5)(c).

POLICY STATEMENT:

A licensed nurse-patient relationship begins when the nurse accepts the assignment for patient care. Patient abandonment occurs when the nurse leaves the nursing assignment without transferring patient care and giving specific patient information to an appropriate care giver.

The Nursing Commission is utilizing the following terms for the purpose of this policy:

“Nursing assignment” - nursing care functions or responsibilities which the nurse has been directed to perform by a person authorized to administer, supervise, or direct the nurse; or independently assumed responsibility for, based on his or her own professional judgment.

“Transferring patient care” - reporting the condition, circumstances, and needs of all patients under the nurse’s care in oral or written form directly to another nurse or appropriate caregiver who acknowledges receipt and understanding of the report.

“Appropriate caregiver” - state-regulated health care professional whose scope of practice and qualifications include the transferred nursing care functions/responsibilities or appropriate family members as may be defined in the agency policies.

Examples:

The following situations are NOT examples of patient abandonment but are examples of employer-employee issues, and will not subject the licensee to possible disciplinary action by the Commission:

A licensed nurse has completed his/her regularly scheduled work shift, and then notifies the employer that the employment relationship between the nurse and the employer is being ended.

A licensed nurse ends the employer-employee relationship without providing the employer a period of time to obtain a replacement for the specific position which the licensee held.

A licensed nurse does not return from a scheduled leave of absence, and has not provided the employer with period of time to obtain replacement staff for that position.

A licensed nurse is asked to work beyond his/her regularly scheduled work shift and informs the employer he/she will not comply with that request.

The Commission believes that failure of the licensee to provide the employer with sufficient notice of intent to end the employment relationship does not constitute patient abandonment. However, the Commission does not encourage licensees to end their employment relationships in such a manner.

This policy is intended to address only the rules cited above regarding patient abandonment, and should not be construed to modify in any way the Nursing Commission’s interpretation of any other laws related to nursing care, nor should it be construed to relieve the licensed nurse from the requirement to abide by all other laws related to nursing practice, including standards of practice set forth in WAC 246-840.